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A LETTER FROM LT. GOVERNOR DAVID DEWHURST ON VOTER I.D. BILL

Yesterday Republican Senator Troy Fraser brought up in the Senate for consideration House Bill 218 by Representative Betty Brown, which simply requires voters to present a driver's license or some other common form of identification at the election polls to prove they are who they say they are: U.S. citizens.

Inexplicably, this legislation has drawn sharp criticism from Democrat Party operatives and affiliated groups. Yesterday all 11 Democrat members of the Texas Senate voted against the bill and blocked it from going forward. I think this is an outrage against all Americans. With eight to 12 million illegal aliens currently living in the U.S., the basic American principle of one person, one vote, is in danger. While critics say the legislation isn't necessary because voter fraud isn't a problem in Texas, the facts tell a different story.

On June 22, 2006, Harris County Tax Assessor-Collector and Voter Registrar Paul Bettencourt testified before the U.S. House Administration Committee that foreign nationals are both applying for and receiving voter registration cards. Data given to my office indicates that in Harris County alone since 1992, 3,742 voters have been removed from the voter rolls because they were not U.S. citizens. From 2003 to 2005 in Bexar County, 303 voters were removed and at least 41 had actually voted before being deleted. Since 1999 in Dallas County, 1,889 voters have been removed and 356 voted before being deleted. During the same period in Tarrant County, 584 were removed. Just last year, El Paso County saw the highest number of non-citizens voting in a state election over a 10 month period, as 213 ineligible voters were removed from the rolls. How many more voted but were never caught? Ten-thousand? Twenty-five thousand? How many legitimate American votes were canceled out by illegal voters?

To most Americans, requiring voters to show some form of ID at the polls seems like a simple and reasonable solution. It's common sense and the standard in other countries and many U.S. states. Considering that a photo ID is required to buy Sudafed, rent a movie, board an airplane, or rent an apartment, I can't understand why anyone would argue the same standard, if not a higher standard, should apply to voting. Why would any Texan oppose legislation that ensures only U.S. citizens vote in elections?

The truth is, most Texans agree. Independent polls, like one recently conducted by Austin-based Baseline & Associates, show Texans overwhelmingly support House Bill 218. The poll found 95% of Republicans, 91% of Independents, and 87% of Democrats believe voters should be required to show a driver's license or other common photo identification before being allowed to vote. This independent poll surveyed 1,001 voters statewide and has a margin of error of plus or minus three percent.

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Friends, you and I know that freedom is not free. I believe protecting the sanctity of American elections is critical to the future of our nation. In the Middle East, American men and women are putting their lives at risk every day to protect American freedom, including the right to vote. Americans have fought for centuries and lost their lives for the right to vote in free and fair elections.

To address critics' concerns about voters who may not have a current ID, House Bill 218 was amended to allow voters to present other forms of identification such as a military ID, valid employee ID, citizenship certificate, passport, student ID card issued by a public college or university, handgun permit, utility bill, bank statement, pay stub, mail from a government entity, marriage license, birth certificate, adoption certificate, pilot's license, hunting license, or even a library card. What's so hard about this?

Seriously, how can any American argue that this requirement is too onerous? I can only conclude that the Senators who voted to block consideration of House Bill 218 did so not because it's good public policy, but because they don't believe in the basic American principle of one person, one vote.

On the floor of the Senate yesterday, the longest-serving Democrat Senator ironically gamed the voting process by walking out of the Senate Chamber in an attempt to stall consideration of the Voter ID bill. When he returned to the Senate floor after his name had been called three times and the vote closed, he cursed and tried to make himself a victim. I wonder how the Senator's constituents feel about this deliberate attempt to block legislation that affects every citizen's right to vote.

As Lieutenant Governor, I have a responsibility to protect and defend our Constitution and the laws of our state and nation. And I'm proud to stand with the vast majority of Texans and the 20 Republican members of the Texas Senate who strongly support preserving the right of Americans who reside in Texas to vote in Texas elections.

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